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RIGHTS OF PERSONS BELONGING TO NATIONAL OR ETHNIC, RELIGIOUS AND LINGUISTIC MINORITIES

Written statement submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[31 March 1998]

GE.98-11754 (E)

1. Year after year, the Commission on Human Rights has discussed, condemned and made recommendations about the military regime of Myanmar regarding all types of human rights abuses committed by its troops and authorities. Respected human rights organizations like Amnesty International, Asia Watch and the Society for Threatened Peoples have referred large dossiers of gross human rights violations in the Shan States, Karenni State, Karen State, and Mon State, not to mention the harassment of the democratic forces within the whole country. Despite such publicity, pressure and recommendations, the military regime of Myanmar remains indifferent and continues to push forward its policies of "Burmanization", coupled with ethnic cleansing and forced assimilation.

2. We would like to focus on the ethnic cleansing within the Shan States. Ethnic cleansing, in effect, is a strategic issue and encompasses self-determination (and all that it entails), human rights, gender issues, the rule of law and legal rights (covering land, resources, property, livelihood, etc.), social justice and other issues. Ethnic cleansing is more than an atrocity. It is a systematic policy aimed at the wholesale deportation of a targeted ethnic group or groups through the use of the coercive instruments of a State, for example, forced evacuation of a people from its homeland by the armed State forces. The ultimate goal is to empty the area of one ethnic group and resettle it with another; to drain a particular area of its ethnic population and take over their land and other resources. Ethnic cleansing is a war of ethnic aggression as it targets the unarmed population, especially women. Wholesale terror inflicted on the targeted ethnic group is aimed at traumatizing children, on whose shoulders rest its future survival and vigour.

3. The military Government of Myanmar has been trying to achieve the above-mentioned goals by making life unbearable for the Shan people. This involves all kinds of harassment: violations of all their rights (including livelihood and means of sustenance), the systematic employment of terror, the encouragement of lawless behaviour of the regime's armed forces, the killing of individuals and, most commonly, the mistreatment of women (rape) so as to humiliate the men and psychologically scar the children.

4. The military regime of Myanmar started its ethnic cleansing policy in early 1996 when some armed resistance movements refused to surrender but offered to sign a ceasefire agreement, an offer which was rejected by the military. In order to destroy those groups they subsequently started a large "relocation" campaign, mainly in the central Shan States. Since then hundreds of thousands of households have been moved from villages to "relocation centres". During this expulsion from their homeland many women have been raped, men have been forced to contribute "voluntary" labour, and many civilians (including Buddhist monks) have been killed by the soldiers. Appeals of resistance groups to be recognized as non-hostile forces have been rejected by the military regime which continues its offensive against them and against the civilians in the Shan States.

5. This shows that the Myanmar Government is not serious about restoring peace, and that its real intention is to empty the central region of the Shan States of their inhabitants. Many of those who survived the killings fled to Thailand where they were not recognized as refugees. The sudden downturn of the Thai economy has changed the situation for the worse. Now the forcibly

displaced people are faced with a terrible choice: to go back to the Shan States where they would be subjected to persecution, neglect and starvation, or to remain in Thailand and risk the danger of arrest and forced repatriation.

6. After a short respite during the monsoon season, the military regime continue the forced relocation of civilians from the Shan States. In Mongkung and in Kesi, 20 battalions are involved in this terrible operation which is affecting approximately 100,000 people. Since 1996, more than 200,000 villagers have been forced at gunpoint to abandon their homes and move to relocation sites near main roads and towns.

7. The latest development reported by the SHAN (Shan Herald Agency for News) on 10 March 1998 was that relief organizations trying to send food and medicine for the Shan refugees in Pang Yone (Pangmapha district in Maehongson province, Thailand) are being denied access to their makeshift camp.

8. To stop this policy of expulsion and ethnic cleansing, the Society for Threatened Peoples calls upon the Commission on Human rights to:

(a) Maintain pressure on the Government of Myanmar to respect human rights and humanitarian law with regard to all minorities in the country, especially in the Shan States;

(b) Recommend that the Security Council authorize a contingent of full-time United Nations human rights rapporteurs to observe and investigate human rights violations - especially forced relocations - in the Shan States;

(c) Recommend that the Security Council authorize a contingent of full-time United Nations human rights rapporteurs to observe and investigate the situation of refugees from Myanmar in Thailand. The Commission should call upon the Government of Thailand to refrain from repatriating the refugees until the human rights situation in Myanmar improves.